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# ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

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## WAR INCONSISTENT WITH THE GOSPEL.

BY W. STOKES, ENGLAND.

The spirit that breathes in Christianity leaves no question in the considerate mind concerning its design. Did it sanction war in any shape, it would be difficult to discover and to affirm its superior excellency, since the bare fact of such a sanction would involve the encouragement of the worst of human passions. But its controlling spirit defies such a suspicion, inasmuch as it inculcates and promotes a temper of mind, a tone of character, invariably meek and gentle. It was itself ushered into the world amidst the joyous prognostics of its certain effects, when angels sang, "Peace on earth; goodwill towards men." And our Lord, in describing the states most congenial with the religion he was about to establish, includes among them the peace-makers, "for they shall be called the children of God."

The ultimate tendency of this spirit is, to render actual the glowing representations of ancient prophecy, which, indeed, were delivered by an inspiration infallibly certain of future events. But these happy times are manifestly to be brought about by the spread of Christianity, which, acquiring a command now scarcely conceivable, shall then determine the tone and character of nations. "The wolf, also, shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation

shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”\*

If such shall be the result of Christianity in the world, is it to be supposed for a moment, that scenes of universal peace are to be realized by cultivating the arts of war? Or that a system which sanctions them can aim at promoting peace? Can it be thought that extremes so distant belong to one system, and that system purely divine? The spirit of war never yet had the hardihood to boast such an original, nor ever yet has ventured to claim kindred with the skies. Founded on the worst passions of our fallen nature, it admits no sympathy with the system that restores it; but, conscious that it opposes its every appearance, it seeks shelter in the shade of past dispensations, or in the guilt of a criminal expediency.

But war is not more opposed to the spirit, than it is to the positive injunctions of Christianity. The precepts of Christ bear most directly on the practice of war; they involve its utter condemnation by inculcating incompatible virtues. These virtues, wherever exercised, render war absolutely impossible; since their practice forbids to injure even an avowed enemy. The spirit of war is the infliction of injury from which the virtues of the gospel instinctively revolt: one proceeds to the destruction of the foe, but the other to do him good. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.”† “I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you.”‡ If these tender and lovely virtues are to prevail, then war will cease to be, for they sap its very foundation. They disarm us of weapons by destroying our enmity; they suppress revenge by the exercise of compassion; and they enjoin a blessing where the pride of man would pronounce a curse.

That war is essentially opposed to Christianity, is evident enough; nor can it ever be proved consistent, until this holy religion shall be subverted, both in its character and aim. Did it sanction the dominion of the common but depraved passions of our nature; did its power exist but in a creed, and not in principles; did it permit the violation of fundamental laws, to promote the purposes of a national expediency; or, in a word, did it permit in nations what it condemns in men, then, indeed, there might be a congeniality between itself and a reckless

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\* Isa. 11: 6. Mic. 4: 3.

† Rom. 12: 20.

‡ Matt. 5: 44.

prodigality of human life. Until then, however, the fact is obvious as the light of heaven, that war is opposed to Christianity in all respects ;—to its purpose, its principles, its spirit, and its laws ; and that there ever will remain an incompatibility between the two, since the first principles of the one condemn the earliest causes of the other.

Expediency has ever attempted to set aside these laws from the conduct of nations, by pleading “that exceptions to general laws must be admitted in the case of nations, or the public safety would be endangered.” This has been used as a defence of war ; because it is thought, that unless nations resort to its practice they could not be great or influential, and in some cases could not even be safe. But such an assumption is evidently erroneous, for the laws of Christianity admit of no exception in favor of any supposed necessity ; for there never can arise the necessity of doing wrong. The laws of Heaven are of universal force, enjoining obedience upon nations as well as upon individuals ; and, since Christianity is the more full development of those laws by divine authority, it is rebellion against that authority to set aside its edicts upon the plea of any conceivable necessity, or of seeking national greatness or security. They are truly great who bow to the commands of God, and they are safe whom he protects ; but, if disobedience to his laws is supposed to be justified by the love of greatness, or the fear of danger, then we renounce our allegiance to the Great God, and, in effect, declare that it is an evil to obey his commands. Can a course so absurd be seriously maintained ? Must a man be bound to obey, where a nation may disobey ? Are communities exempt, where individuals are commanded ? If they assert that nations are excepted by the laws of expediency, let them produce their authority for the exception.

In the wars of the Jews, that people possessed this authority in the special appointments of God, from whom in all their proceedings they received their commission. In that dark and typical dispensation, the Most High exercised his undoubted prerogative in a remarkable manner, and punished ungodly nations by overwhelming calamities or by extirpating wars. That he possessed this prerogative, and the right to its exercise by such instruments as he saw fit to employ, must be admitted, except we would disown his divine sovereignty ; but the exercise of this divine prerogative is no precedent for human conduct *apart from an express commission*. He who gives life, certainly possesses the right to take it away ; and, if he is pleased, in accomplishing his purposes, to employ human

means in the shape of *appointed* wars, he does but make a selection of one class among many that are wholly at his disposal. But, because the Divine Being once appointed wars to accomplish his purposes, that man should deem himself at liberty to appoint and practise them too, is an assumption as unwarrantable as it is profane. Are God and man upon an equality? Does man resume his own when he takes away life? The disposal of life is the sole prerogative of God; and human interference is not permitted, except by an express commission from above. This commission was granted to the Jews, and this alone constituted the sanction of their wars. They were commanded to slay with the sword, and otherwise to punish the idolatrous nations around them: but it is remarkable, as a fact in their history, that in all their wars they were expected to seek counsel of the Lord, since he only could give them their commission. Without it, even their wars were not sanctioned; so far from it, that they frequently produced their greatest distresses, and thus they were taught that God alone could dictate in the punishment of the world.

The first dispensation was, in truth, a partial system of government of temporary duration, serving as an illustration of the divine sovereignty, and was intended to curb the evils which a better system only could remove. To cure the vices of the nations, it required a perfect code of laws, and a perfect rule of morals; but these it was reserved for Christianity to develop to the world. To this, the former dispensation served but as an introduction; and when Christianity appeared, then the partial system withdrew, having accomplished its purpose, leaving the government of the world to a new legislator, who, bringing life and immortality to light, promulgated new laws with more elevated principles of action. It involves a fallacy most serious, therefore, in national polity, to seek a sanction for war in the proceedings of that former dispensation; because, on the one hand, we have not the same commission, and, on the other, we possess a better guide. War now is at variance with both dispensations; for plainly it wants the commission of the one, and as plainly it possesses not the sanction of the other.

To appeal to the old dispensation for rules of conduct in *all* respects, is virtually to abrogate Christianity, and to pronounce it an insufficient guide in human affairs, than which nothing can be more preposterous and unjustifiable. Whatever was of permanent utility in the first, is incorporated in the new economy, and combines to form, in that connection, the *only* recognized guide to the world. But whatever is not thus incor-

porated or recognized, is of no authority either as a law or a precedent for present conduct. The moral law, which was the basis of the first dispensation, is fulfilled and enforced in the economy of the gospel; but the mass of the Mosaic institutions, many of which being typical, were, with the proceedings of the Jews in their national affairs, abrogated by the coming of Christ, as not congenial with his better and more perfect institutes. Among the enactments thus rejected, will be found those which sanctioned retaliation in case of offences; and it is very singular, that the advocates of war should plead in their defence a principle which, though introduced by Moses, has been specially repealed by Christ. Retaliation, which is one of the admitted grounds of defensive war, was thus sanctioned by Moses. "And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."\* The conduct thus sanctioned, is precisely that which, prior to the dictates of Christ, appeared just and equal; and the principle on which it is based, assuming the name of natural justice, is strongly affirmed to be necessary in the government of states. Montesquieu, that admitted master of law, argues thus: "In the case of natural defence I have a right to kill, because my life is, in respect to me, what the life of my antagonist is to him. In the same manner a state wages war, because its preservation is equally just with that of any other state."† Similar arguments are urged by Paley in his *Political Philosophy*, and by Woolaston in his *Religion of Nature*; and it is very observable how exceedingly uniform are deistical and semi-christian conclusions on this subject; for the man that despises, and he who simply *neglects*, the Christian system, alike proceed to the same result.

In the above quotations, the French author and the precepts of Moses appear to agree; but to *Christian* nations neither is an authority, since the retaliating principle is repealed by one greater than both. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."‡ If the principle of natural justice only is an admitted guide, then war may be met by war, and the weapons of fierce defence may decorate the persons of *Christian* combatants; but, if the authority of Christ is to prevail, if the laws of the new economy are to regulate men, then the bloody weapon must repose in its scabbard, and nations for ever forget the art of war.

\* Deut. 19: 21.

† Vol. I, Bk. 10, C. 2.

‡ Mat. 5: 39.